

JAPANTOWN

From early in Seattle’s history, the area around the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Main Street has been regarded as Seattle’s Nihonmachi (Japantown).

A cluster of historic buildings, including the Panama Hotel, is located in this area at the northern edge of the Seattle Chinatown National Register Historic District. Topographically, the Japantown area is relatively flat between 4th and 5th Avenue, climbing upward toward Interstate 5. Perched at the top of the hill, Kobe Terrace Park and Danny Woo Gardens offer generous views of the city, Elliott Bay, and the Olympic Mountains to the west and south. While they provide views, the steep slopes of this area hinder pedestrian travel.

The combination of real estate markets, zoning restrictions and topographical challenges have resulted in low levels of development in Japantown over the past half century. Several properties remain in surface parking lot use, primarily serving commuter parking needs. Within the past decade, two senior housing projects, one apartment-turned-condominium development and construction of the City’s Emergency Operation Center/Fire Station #10 have begun to fill available properties, generally in wood-frame buildings less than 85 feet in height. The close proximity to Downtown and transit hubs in South Downtown makes this an attractive area for accommodating future growth.

Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan describes the International District Residential (IDR) zone and International Special Review District as follows:

“Areas of the International Special Review District identified for development as a predominantly residential neighborhood in conformance with the Downtown Urban Center Goals. The IDR land use district is intended to:

- *maintain areas primarily for residential use;*
- *allow other uses compatible with housing, with the general intent that they reinforce and do not detract from the primary residential function of the area; and*
- *recognize and promote the area’s unique social and urban design character through the IDR designation and the regulations of the International Special Review District.”*

Consistent with the overall Livable South Downtown strategy of emphasizing dense housing near core neighborhood areas, land use recommendations support the continued development of a residentially-focused, mixed use neighborhood in the Japantown area. Recommended zoning includes three IDR zone designations that emphasize increased residential density in a diversity of building types.

Other recommended amendments to the Land Use Code establish incentives for affordable housing and neighborhood amenities. Active ground-level uses in the IDR zone, in combination with a greater residential presence and streetscape improvements, will help to make this area safer and more walkable for pedestrians, and provide a stronger sense of neighborhood character.

OBJECTIVES FOR FUTURE LAND USE

1. Maximize housing opportunities adjacent to Downtown employment centers, Chinatown/International District retail businesses, and regional transit services.
2. Enhance neighborhood livability by transforming the street network into a series of well-designed public spaces that serve pedestrians in addition to automobiles.
3. Add life and activity to public spaces by providing active uses on street-facing lower floors.
4. Ensure adequate access to light and air and preserve views from Kobe Terrace Park and the Danny Woo Community Garden through height and bulk limits that encourage carefully spaced towers.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ZONING

The Proposed IDR 150 Zone

Amendments to the IDR zone are intended to shape new buildings to preserve views southward from Kobe Terrace Park, and encourage redevelopment of several area parcels to residential use. Features of recommended zoning in this area include:



- Retaining existing density limits. Commercial uses would be limited to 1 FAR. Residential uses would not be subject to a density limit.
- Modifying bulk controls of the existing International District Residential (IDR 150 feet) zone adjacent to Kobe Terrace Park to allow more design flexibility for development of upper floors, but with additional provisions for setbacks to help preserve views.
- Requiring upper-level setbacks on S. Main Street and a greenstreet on Maynard Avenue S. to preserve views from Kobe Terrace Park. A 15 foot setback is recommended above 45 feet, structures greater than 65 feet in height.
- Eliminating minimum lot size in order for structures to be built above 125 feet in height while simplifying

development standards to allow buildings to be more efficiently constructed to 150 feet.

- ISRD Board review would continue to inform building design and use, with DON Director approval after Board recommendation required for future development.
- Continue to allow departures from certain development through optional participation in the City's Design Review process (current standard).

Japantown

In IDR zones, limit coverage of lot area for upper stories

In IDR/C zone only residential uses allowed above 125' up to 240' Unlimited residential density subject to bulk controls

Encourage green roofs and other low impact development technologies

Designate S. Washington St. as Green Street with "park-like" street edges created as part of new development

Require parking to be underground with access from alley, where possible

Note: Tall buildings will be predominantly residential on upper floors. Greater flexibility for taller commercial buildings in the IDR/C zone as compared to the IDR zone.

In IDR zones, buildings with a taller base must have a slimmer tower

All new development above base allowable height and density must meet affordable housing bonus requirement

Ensure light and air access and protect views from Kobe Terrace Park and Danny Woo Garden

In IDR zones, require 60' separation of buildings taller than 120'

In IDR zones, limit maximum width of building stories above 85' high

On Main Street between 5th & 6th Avenues, require retail uses on ground floor

Retain special review district parking location and screening standards

Along east/west and Green Streets require 16' building setbacks at 65' height

Encourage hillside terraces as part of new development to assist people ascending steep slopes

Require buildings to be modulated and set back in a manner that supports pedestrian-oriented streetscape character



Designate S. Main St as Green Street

This depiction is presented for illustration purposes only. White structures depict existing buildings

MAKERS
architecture • planning • urban design

The Proposed IDR 45/125-240 Zone and IDR/C 125/150-240 Zone

In addition to the IDR 150 zone, two additional IDR zones are recommended:

- International District Residential/Commercial (IDR/C) 125/150-240; and
- International District Residential (IDR) 45/125-240.

The IDR/C zone provides flexibility in the location of commercial uses, which will support better design of mixed-use buildings. In addition, upper level setback requirements are recommended to be amended in order to help ensure feasibility of development on small and large sites.

Both zone designations are intended to allow a range of uses while emphasizing a dense residential population. The allowable density of uses at various heights is a key distinction between these two zones. Both zones allow for residential buildings up to 240 feet in height with provisions for appropriate massing and shaping of towers. An important objective of zoning in this area is the development of a green street network that complements the anticipated residential population, and the expansion of pedestrian-oriented uses in specific locations.

Commercial Uses

Consistent with existing zoning, residential uses would be emphasized toward the top of Japantown hill, while commercial uses are encouraged along 4th and 5th Avenues South.

- In the IDR 45/125-240 zone, the base commercial floor area limit is recommended to remain at 1 FAR, and maximum commercial density is recommended to be 2 FAR if at least 50% of the building is in residential use. The proposed maximum height limit for commercial use is 45 feet.
- In the IDR/C 125/150-240 zone, the limit on commercial floor area is recommended to be 3 FAR, or 6 FAR for hotels consistent with existing zoning. The maximum height limit for commercial use of 125 feet. No bonus floor area for commercial use is recommended.



Residential Uses

In both zones, upper levels of structures are intended to accommodate only residential uses.

- In the IDR 45/125-240 zone, only residential uses would be allowed above the maximum height limit of 45 feet for commercial uses. However, above 125 feet residential floor area would be permitted only through participation in incentive zoning (Incentive zoning provisions are described beginning on page 80 of this report).
- In the IDR/C 125/150-240 zone, only residential uses would be allowed above the maximum height limit of 125 feet for commercial uses. However, above 150 feet, residential floor area would be permitted only through participation in incentive zoning.



Seventh and Washington, 1925

Development Standards

Proposed IDR zoning does not contemplate that every parcel would be eligible for the 240 foot maximum height limit. Rather, a diversity of building types and heights are anticipated in the Japantown area, depending upon site conditions.

Buildings over 150 feet in height are recommended to be allowed only on lots at least 21,000 square feet in size in order to ensure an appropriate massing of towers in proportion to the lot and to surrounding lots. This standard, in combination with the development standards identified in the chart on this page, will help to ensure access to light and air throughout the neighborhood. Development on smaller lots will likely feature wood-frame construction up to 85 feet in height. Wood frame construction for buildings with smaller floor sizes is efficient and relatively less costly to the developer.

Development standards are recommended to help ensure buildings that provide an appropriate scale. Proposed standards include:

- A minimum lot size of 21,000 square feet for any structure exceeding 150 feet;
- Required façade modulation to provide interest and diversity in the appearance of buildings;
- A Maximum Tower Width. For residential floors above 150 feet: maximum permitted façade width would be 100 feet in the north-south direction, for portions of buildings above 85 feet in height; and
- Upper level coverage limits are recommended as shown in the following chart:

For structures 150 feet or Less in Height

Height of portion of structure (in feet)	Percent of lot coverage permitted	
	Floors with residential uses as the predominant use	Floors with non-residential or live-work uses as the predominant use
0 – 65	No limit	No limit
66 – 125	75%	No limit
125 – 150	65%	NA

Coverage Limits for Floors in Predominantly Nonresidential Use above 45 feet in Height for Structures exceeding 150 in Height

Height of portion of structure (in feet)	Percent of lot coverage permitted
0-45	No limit
46– 125	For floors with nonresidential uses as the predominant use: no limit For floors with a majority of floor area in residential use: 35% of lot area, or an average gross floor area of 9,000 square feet for stories with floor heights between 46 feet and 125 feet, whichever is greater.
126 – 240	35% of lot area or an average gross floor area per story of 9,000 square feet, whichever is greater.

Coverage Limits for Floors in Predominantly Residential Use above 45 feet in Height for Structures exceeding 150 in Height

Height of portion of structure (in feet)	Percent of lot coverage permitted
0 – 45	No limit
46 – 85	75%
86 – 240	35% of lot area, or an average gross floor area of 9,000 square feet per story, whichever is greater.

International Special Review District Board review would continue to inform building design and use, with DON Director approval after Board recommendations required for future development. As in all Downtown zones, departures from certain development standards may be considered through optional participation in the City’s Design Review process.

Setbacks

For building taller than 65 feet the following setback requirements are recommended:

- **Green Streets in IDR.** A continuous setback of 15 feet along the green street property line for all portions of the structure above 45 feet in height. This setback would not be required for a structure 65 feet or lower.
- **Green Streets in IDR/C.** For lots abutting a designated green street in the IDR/C zone, a minimum setback of 6 feet at street level along the green street property line. A setback of 16 feet would be required from the required street lot line for all portions of a structure above a height of 65 feet.
- **Abutting lots.** A continuous upper-level setback of 15 feet from a side lot line that is not a street lot line for all portions of a structure above a height of 65 feet.



Japantown - intersection of 5th Ave S and S Jackson St - eye-level view

MAKES



Japantown - looking East on S Main St - eye-level view

Gray structures depict existing building

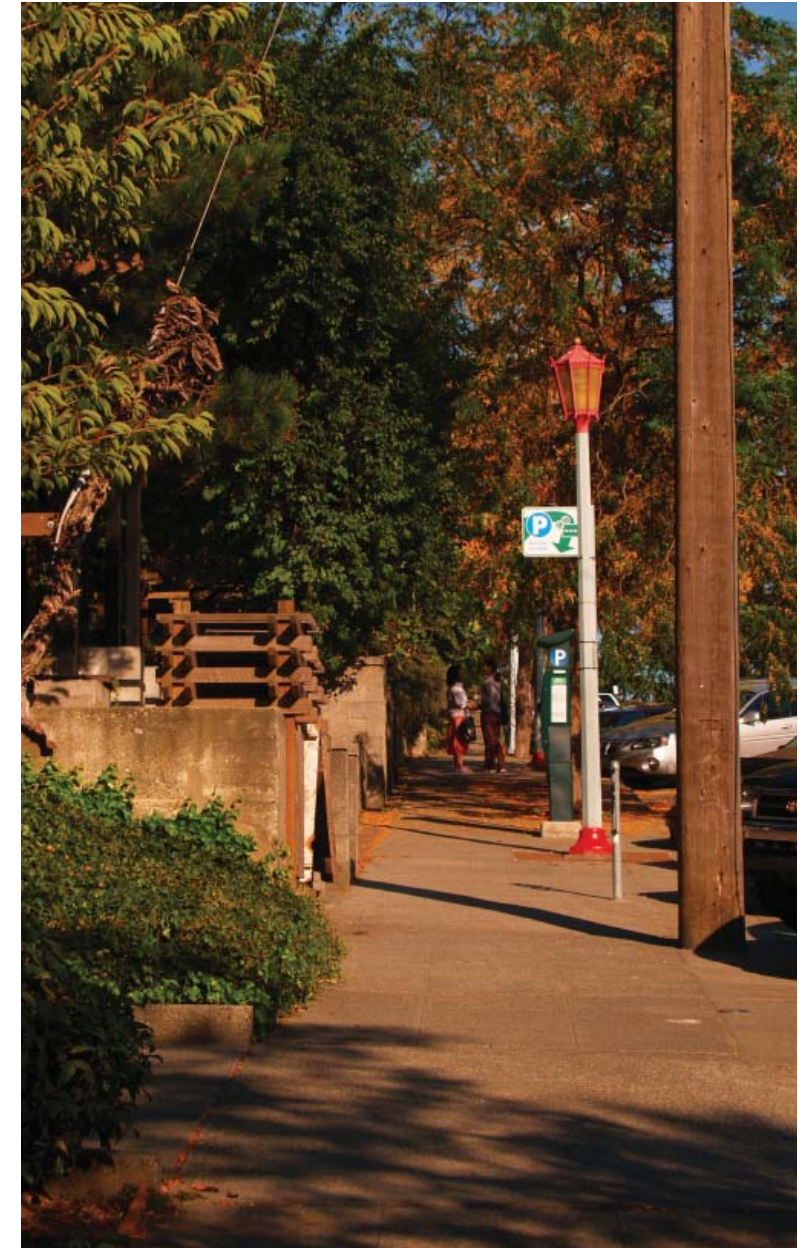
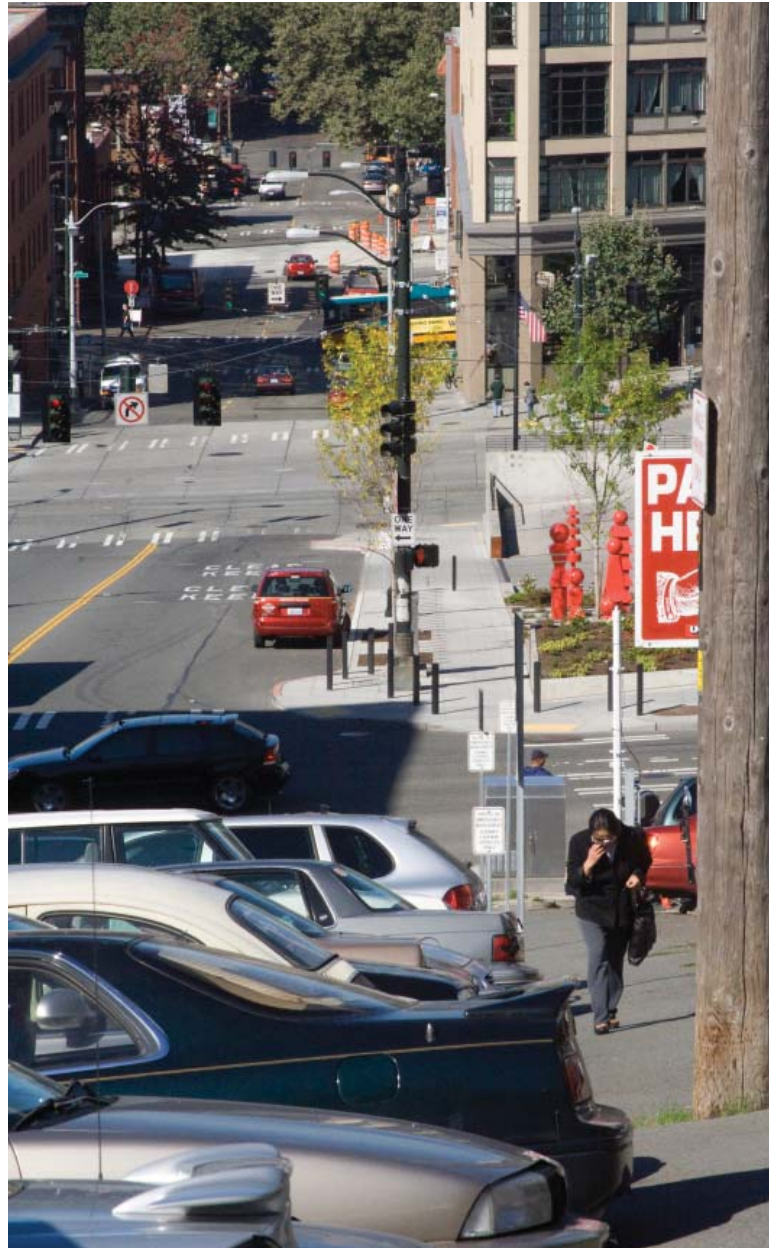
MAKES



Future Street Character

Development projects in the Japantown area will continue to provide street improvements as currently required, and may provide green street improvements as a means to gain extra floor area under incentive provisions. The following Code amendments are intended to facilitate the creation of pedestrian-oriented street amenities that may include park-like landscaping and other features:

- The designation of S. Washington Street as a “green street,” in addition to the existing green street designation along S. Main Street.
- The development of a “residential hillside terrace” as a public amenity option to encourage landscaped areas near sidewalks and open spaces along steep slopes that may provide places for pedestrians to rest as they ascend Japantown’s hills.
- A requirement that buildings be modulated and set back in a manner that reinforces the pedestrian-oriented character of streets.
- A requirement that upper level setbacks be provided to preserve views from Kobe Terrace Park.
- A requirement for pedestrian-oriented retail uses at the corner of 6th Avenue S. and S. Main Street.
- Identification of certain streets outside the Asian Character District/retail core as “Class I Pedestrian Streets” and “Class II Pedestrian Streets” to provide a continuous pedestrian-friendly street environment between Japantown and nearby neighborhood areas.



Summary of Proposed Base and Maximum FAR and Height Limits

Zone	Base	Maximum
IDR 150	1 FAR commercial uses Residential uses not subject to an FAR limit	1 FAR commercial uses Residential uses not subject to an FAR limit
IDR 45/125-240	1 FAR commercial uses 125 feet for residential uses	2 FAR commercial if 50% of the floor area of the building is in residential use, not through bonus provisions. 240 feet for residential uses
IDR/C 125/150 - 240	3 FAR commercial / 6 FAR hotels 150 feet for residential uses	3 FAR commercial / 6 FAR hotels 240 feet for residential uses

